



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Russian Actions in Georgia

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Kyle Scott
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
April 24, 2008

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States has long welcomed Georgia's efforts to implement economic and political reforms and we continue to support Georgia's aspirations and unflagging determination to become fully integrated into the Euro-Atlantic community of nations.

We continue to be deeply disturbed by actions that appear aimed at undermining Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders.

These actions are unacceptable.

The United States, along with the overwhelming majority of participating States, as well as the OSCE Chairman in Office, the Secretary General of NATO and others, has expressed serious concern about recent actions by the Government of the Russian Federation to upgrade relations with the Abkhaz and South Ossetian authorities. Such actions cannot help but call into question Russia's role as a facilitator and peacekeeper in the region. We have urged the Russian Government to repeal the instructions.

We now must take the floor again in response to the latest incident, the April 20th downing of an unarmed Georgian air reconnaissance vehicle flying over Georgian territorial waters off the coast of the Georgian region of Abkhazia. The destruction by a fighter jet, probably a Russian MiG-29, within Georgian air space, of a slow-moving, unmanned reconnaissance aircraft, basically a video camera with wings, escalates tensions, contradicts the spirit of the UN Friends process, and could destabilize the entire region.

This act unfortunately does not stand in isolation, but is one in a long line of intrusive, destabilizing events that are clearly designed to challenge Georgian sovereignty and territorial integrity. We have raised these events, such as the missile incident in August, in this forum. Other steps have further fueled the fear of "creeping annexation" of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Among them is the wholesale granting of Russian passports to Georgian nationals in the breakaway regions, the recent Russian presidential instructions to Russian ministries that were raised at last week's PC and again today, and numerous instances of the integration of infrastructure in the breakaway regions directly with Russia.

Tensions are high, and rising. This cannot continue.

We therefore call on all sides to exercise maximum restraint in this volatile region. We again encourage both sides to engage in constructive discussions regarding President Saakashvili's recent peace plan for Abkhazia, which we commend as a genuine and viable proposal.

We concur with Russia's stated goal of easing the poverty and isolation of the populations in the separatist regions. But this must be done by working through the Government of Georgia, which has primary responsibility for the well-being of people living on its territory. This need not be difficult. For example, Russia has been long encouraged to coordinate with Georgia and the OSCE on the economic reconstruction program in South Ossetia. We should also be placing a renewed priority on the safe return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their homes.

We welcome the recent moves by Russia to lift restrictions on communication and transportation links with Georgia, and see them as examples of a diplomatic trend that should be developed further and encouraged. We also call on Russia to accept joint monitoring of Georgia's Roki Tunnel, in cooperation with the OSCE, as a crucial element in increasing military transparency and bolstering confidence to reduce politico-military tension. Many problems remain and the United States reiterates its readiness to work with the neighbors, friends, and allies of Georgia to resolve them.

Mr. Chairman,

Recent developments have brought only anger and danger to the countries involved, to the region, and to all OSCE participating states. We are grateful that existing mechanisms have prevented open war, but we lament that peace and prosperity elude us.

The United States urges the OSCE to consider new measures on an urgent basis to build confidence, to engage in efforts to find peaceful solutions to these conflicts, and to help Georgia and her neighbor reconcile on the road to peaceful cooperation and regional development.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.